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Patios, Stairways and Iron Lace Balconies

of Old New Orleans

PATIOS, STAIRWAYS AND IRON-LACE BALCONIES

A Foggy Morning in the *Place d'Armes*

PATIOS, STAIRWAYS AND IRON-LACE BALCONIES OF OLD NEW ORLEANS

A Series of Photographs by
EUGENE A. DELCROIX

with an Introduction by
STANLEY CLISBY ARTHUR

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Introduction

IT HAS LONG been an axiom that the camera is essentially a realist, the artist essentially an idealist — and never the twain shall meet. It has been charged that while the camera brings us nature and life and inanimate things as they are, it is a factual instrument not endowed with either grace nor romance, and that the artist better pleases by bringing to us imagination, vision, romance impression, drama — even exaggeration.

It is also claimed that the artist is a complete master of his palette, his brushes, etching needle, crayon, pencils, and like mediums of expression, while the man who must secure pictorial results with a camera has no control of his factual instrument.

But *is* all this true? Doubt assails us and we question such dogmatic assertions as — the camera captures only that within the ken of its lens, the interesting and the otherwise, the good and the bad, the colorful and the drab; that the resultant photograph is cluttered up with unnecessary detail, lacks drama, is destitute of proper emphasis or correct shading, or is without delicate impression, and that there is a paucity of idealism.

Indeed, we know this is not true when we scrutinize familiar places of interest in Old New Orleans as presented in this collection of pictures made by Eugene Delcroix with his camera.

In the pages which follow are two score of pictures to evidence that an artistic idealist and a photographic realist can rely upon idealism, impressionism, and other characteristics of Art and combine them with realism and photographic accuracy without sacrificing the charm of Art or of violating any of its canons. No more can one who makes meaningless scratches on a copper plate, or daub globs of violently hued pigments on canvas, or splashes watercolors on drawing paper be called an artist, than can the average snap-shotter or camera enthusiast be called an artist.

On the other hand, Eugene Delcroix handles his camera with the same adroitness that an etcher handles his needle, with the same skill a painter uses his brushes and tubes of oil, or as another uses crayon and pencil to achieve results . . . and who today can claim that the camera intelligently handled — intelligently mastered, if you will — cannot achieve a high and lasting art.

Noted for its distinctive Creole architecture (neither wholly French or wholly Spanish but an artistic commingling of the two), the venerable buildings in the *Vieux Carré* or "Old Square" of New Orleans, have had for more than a century a fame all their own. Equally notable are their balconies of "iron lace", some hand-hammered from Spanish wrought-iron by Spanish artisans, others of the later but more heavily designed English, French, and American cast-iron. The architects of these old structures also won fame for their gracefully designed stairways with hand-rails of shining mahogany, for their skill in making fan-windows, in laying out flagged patios and courtyards, for their arched corridors piercing the ground floor from the *banquette* to the patios in the rear . . . all so typically Creole.

Therefore, it is not at all strange that a native son of Creole New Orleans should have become the leading photographic exponent of these charms of this delightful quarter of the city

of his birth. For, of all the photographic pictorialists who have endeavored to translate through the medium of the lens the bygone magnificence and unique character of the *Vieux Carré,* 'Gene Delcroix has been, undoubtedly, the most successful.

Many have tried to emulate the Delcroix picturization of Old New Orleans but none has succeeded. Countless others even have tried to copy the very places he has pictured with such fidelity, charm, and atmosphere — but none has succeeded. For years Delcroix's photographs of the *Vieux Carré* have held a place all their own for, in addition to knowing intimately all the picturesque spots of the French Quarter, he brings to his work an artistic talent which is envied by many fellow workers of the brush, pencil, or etching needle, and, in addition, he exercises complete mastery over the medium he has selected to record and reproduce his impressions of the city he knows and loves.

The secret of his success as a pictorialist is his demand for the truth as he sees it, and perfection of technique. As a result his photographs have for years outstripped in sales the combined output of all others who attempt to picture the *Vieux Carré.*

With this, his first published work, Eugene A. Delcroix takes his place besides such artists as Joseph Pennell, Ellsworth Woodward and William Woodward, who pictured the *Vieux Carré* of the past, and Arnold Genthe, Alberta Kinsey, Clarence Millet, A. C. Webb, William P. Spratling, Knute Heldner, Florence R. Durkee, and many others who, through their artistic talents, are leaving a lasting, truthful record of the most picturesque section of New Orleans, America's most interesting city.

Stanley Clisby Arthur

Eugene A. Delcroix

THE HEART OF NEW ORLEANS
Vista of the Cathedral's spires and nearby
rooftops as seen from the balcony of the
Le Prêtre mansion at Orleans and Dauphine streets.

PATIO OF MAISON SEIGNOURET

The most pictured courtyard in New Orleans is that at 520 Royal street where François Seignouret made the famed furniture which bears his name.

IRON GATES OF THE LOUISIANA BANK

Guarding the entrance of the historic building at Royal and Conti streets, erected in 1826, are these massive examples of the ironmaster's art.

STAIRWAY IN THE "NAPOLEON HOUSE"
For well over a century ascending and descending feet
have worn the tread of these aged cypress steps
of the old Girod mansion at Chartres and St. Louis streets.

THE WISHING GATES

Sunlight and shadows form a pleasing design in the arched corridor of the "Spanish Courtyard" at 616 Royal street, a building erected in 1831.

CORRIDOR OF THE PATIO ROYAL

Spanish arches, an iron gateway, a mahogany stairway, and colorful *ollas* are to be found in the corridor of the old Faurie *casa,* 417 Royal street, built in 1801.

THE FAN WINDOW

The most pictured fan window in the *Vieux Carré* is that one which overlooks the patio of the old mansion at 628 Toulouse street, built by Jean Baptiste Jacob in 1813.

WINDING STAIRWAY

A striking example of the carpenter's art is the stairway at 607 Royal street in the Brigot buildings erected in 1834.

COURTYARD OF THE TWO SISTERS

Old iron gates guard the famed patio at 613 Royal street named for two sisters who for a score of years kept a variety store in the old building erected in 1832.

PATIO OF THE LABATUT MANSION

Through a typical Spanish arch is glimpsed the courtyard of the old home of General Jean Baptiste Labatut, 623 Royal street, built in 1821.

THE PERFECT STAIRWAY

Acknowledged by architects to be the perfect example of a winding, self-supporting stairway is that one to be seen in the building, erected in 1838, at 629 Toulouse street.

IRON LACE AND SUNLIGHT

The famed balcony decorations of cast-iron of the Labranche buildings at the corner of Royal and St. Peter streets built in 1830. The cast-iron motif is oak leaves and acorns.

WHERE 'SIEUR GEORGE LIVED

This building at Royal and St. Peter streets, called variously "Doctor LeMonnier's Home", "The Sky-scraper Building", and " 'Sieur George's House" because George W. Cable used it in his pathetic tale of *'Sieur George*. Built in 1811, it is one of the most interesting structures in the *Vieux Carré*.

OLD SPANISH FIREPLACE

In the ancient *casa* of Don Juan Mercier at 630 St. Peter street, is to be seen this old kitchen fireplace built in 1796.

PATIO OF THE LITTLE THEATRE

Framed by fan transom and high glass doors is seen the charming courtyard of *Le Petit Théâtre du Vieux Carré,* in St. Peter street opposite the Cabildo. This is a reconstruction after the Spanish period.

MAHOGANY STAIRWAY

Typical Delcroix treatment of one of the many characteristic winding stairways in the French Quarter is this gracefully constructed stairway at 831 St. Louis street.

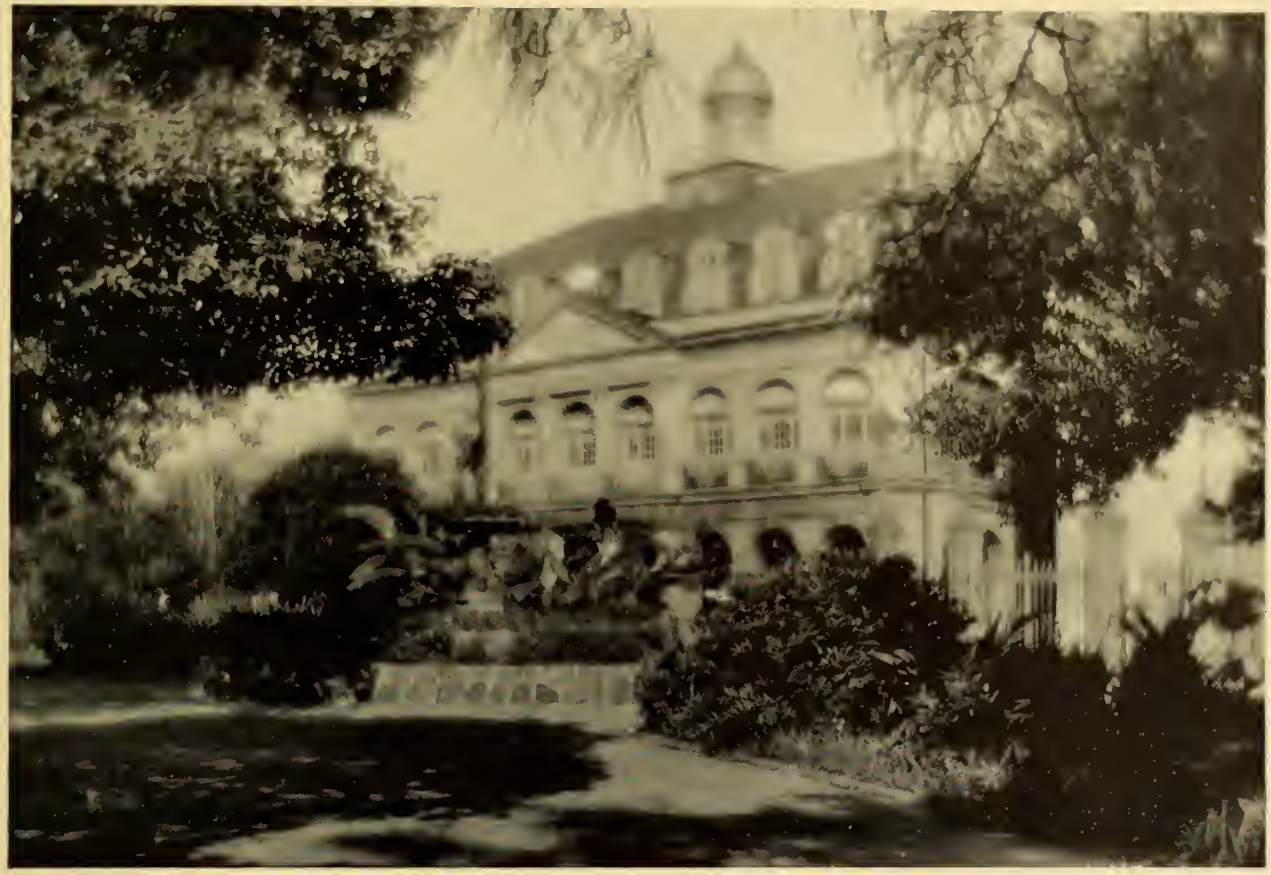
RUE D'ORLEANS
A glimpse along Orleans street and a photographic impression of iron balconies and the rear of the St. Louis Cathedral.

SAINT LOUIS CATHEDRAL

The three towering spires of the Cathedral are seen through the gateway of the ironwork that fences the green trees and lawns of Jackson Square. This historic place of worship was built in 1794 by Don Andres Almonester y Roxas, a wealthy Spanish notary.

THE CABILDO

The seat of the Spanish government of Louisiana which housed the *Very Illustrious Cabildo,* a body of administrators, was called the *Casa Capitular* when it was built in 1795 by Don Andres Almonester.



SPANISH ARCHES

A striking treatment of the entrance to the Cabildo showing the massiveness of the construction of this government building.

CABILDO GATES

These massive iron gates, probably forged and erected after the American occupation of Louisiana, exhibit the thirteen stars representing the original thirteen states of the Union.

CABILDO COURTYARD

An ancient lamp against the massive brick wall of the Cabildo is chosen for the motif of this camera study of the patio of the ancient building.

FAN TRANSOM

Opened windows frame this distant view of the spires of the St. Louis Cathedral, but strikingly illustrated is the ancient fan transom.

CABILDO STAIRWAY

Typically Creole is this winding stairway leading to the upper floor of the old Cabildo.

RUELLE D'ORLEANS

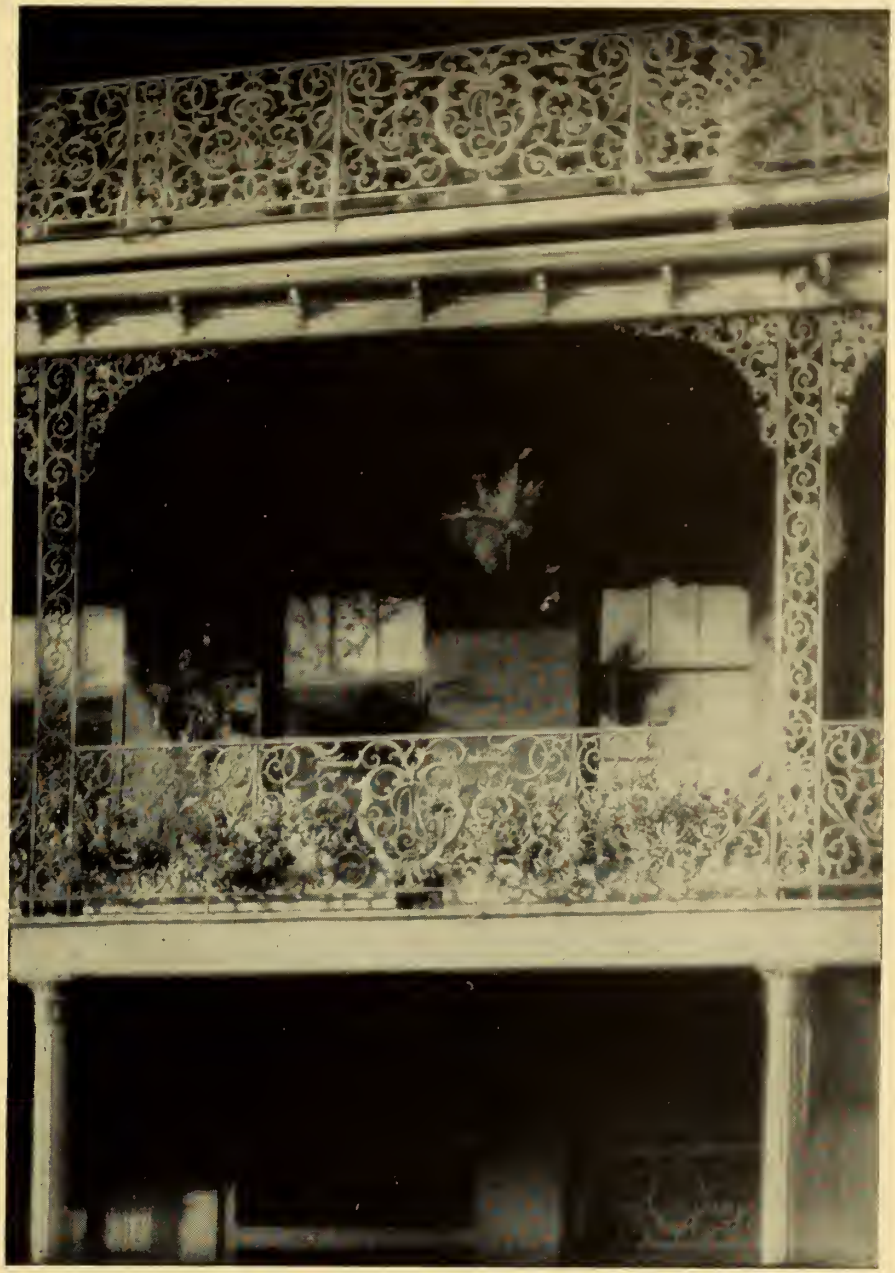
Ancient buildings and iron clad balconies line the narrow *ruelle* or alley, on the upperside of the Cathedral extending from Chartres to Royal streets. Sometimes called "Pirates' Alley."

THE PONTALBA APARTMENTS

Fronting the ancient *Place d'Armes* of the French, the *Plaza de Armas* of the Spanish, and Jackson Square of the Americans, are two block-long red brick buildings built in 1850 by the Baroness de Pontalba, born Michaëla Almonester, daughter of the wealthy Spaniard who erected the Cathedral.

PONTALBA IRON WORK

Lining the balconies of the Pontalba Apartments is the tendril-like cast-iron work made in France which displays the intertwined initials of union of the families of Almonester and Pontalba.



THE URSULINES' CONVENT

The first nunnery to be established in Louisiana is the massive structure at Chartres and Ursulines streets. Built in 1734, it remained the convent of the Ursuline nuns for ninety years.

CONVENT STAIRWAY

Probably the oldest stairway in New Orleans is that just inside the wide doors of the Ursulines Convent.

BIRTHPLACE OF PAUL MORPHY

Opposite the Ursulines Convent, at 1113 Chartres street, is the old home built by Joseph Le Carpentier in 1827 and here was born his grandson Paul Charles Morphy, the great master at chess.

WINDING STAIRWAY

Interesting example of an early winding stairway, leading from a patio to second story apartments, is that one to be seen in the old Marchand mansion at 830 Royal street.

MADAME JOHN'S LEGACY

The oldest building in New Orleans is at 632 Dumaine street, built by Captain Jean Pascal in 1726. It gains its present name of "Madame John's Legacy" because George W. Cable used it in his story of *'Tite Poulette.*

THE GREEN SHUTTER PATIO

Typical of the courtyards in the *Vieux Carré* is the one in the rear of a Spanish *casa,* at 710 St. Peter street, built prior to 1796.

"LAFFITE'S BLACKSMITH SHOP"

It is more than doubtful that this ancient little place was ever the "Laffite Smithy" or that the pirate brothers ever engaged in blacksmithing. But there is no doubt that this *briquetté entre poteaux* [bricked between posts] house at Bourbon and St. Philip streets was standing in 1772.

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PATIO OF *CASA* MONTEGUT

Typical of the Creole-Spanish architecture of the Old Square, is the old home of Dr. Joseph Montegut at 731 Royal street, and its patio is a distinctive relic of the 1796 period.

OLD SLAVE QUARTERS
At 620 Governor Nicholls street where were housed the family servants befor' de war.

IRON LACE IN THE ESPLANADE

Cast-iron lined the balconies of the homes the élite erected along the Esplanade when that thoroughfare became a stylish street in the 1830's.

OLD ABSINTHE HOUSE

Erected in 1816 by Don Francisco Juncadella, a Spanish importer for his commission business, his plastered brick *casa* became in later years a café, and when Cayetano Ferrér served dripped absinthe here, he renamed the place, in 1874, "The Absinthe House."

ABSINTHE HOUSE STAIRWAY

Differing from the stairways usually found in the old mansions of the *Vieux Carré* is the one Señor Juncadella designed when he built his famous *casa*.

THE OLD AND THE NEW

Ancient homes of old New Orleans in Bourbon street,
with their wealth of cast-iron balcony decorations,
are viewed in contrast with the high towers of the American and
Hibernia bank buildings of new New Orleans.

Historic data used in describing
the buildings pictured
are from
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